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ON SOME DEDUCTIONS FROM THE DOCTRINE  
OF CONSEQUENCES IN ETHICS.

ALAN DORWARD.

**I**F the majority of mankind based their conduct on ethical theory, and if the circulation of the INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS were as large as that of some daily newspapers, then an article which appeared in that JOURNAL some five years ago would already have caused a considerable commotion. For, if the statements made in that article ("The Doctrine of Consequences in Ethics," by C. D. Broad) are true, a certain conclusion follows—the conclusion that no one can ever know what actions it is right for him to perform.

This startling conclusion is not indeed put forward explicitly in the article. All that Mr. Broad proposes to do there is to examine certain ethical concepts employed by Mr. Bertrand Russell and Mr. G. E. Moore in recent works. His examination tends to show that these concepts have not in some cases been defined with sufficient clearness, and that they do not correspond, so nearly as their authors suppose, to the notions of common-sense. He concludes by defining some other concepts which he holds to be free from the defects discovered in those of Mr. Russell and Mr. Moore.

All this seems innocent enough. But no one, I think, could read the article attentively without observing that the positions there taken up lead inevitably to the sceptical conclusion which I have stated. In order to bring this out, I shall sketch briefly the relevant parts of Mr. Broad's argument. Those parts which are important for our present purpose are mostly contained in the section of the article which deals with Mr. Russell's position, and it will, therefore, not be necessary to touch, except incidentally, on what is said about Mr. Moore's.

The whole discussion starts from the notion, drawn from

the moral judgments of common-sense, of *right action*. According to Mr. Russell, the rightness or wrongness (in the most important senses of these words) of an action depends solely on its consequences, or on what the agent believes or should reasonably believe about its consequences. Mr. Broad, on the other hand, while agreeing that consequences are extremely important, is inclined to admit that motives may also have a bearing on the rightness or wrongness of an action.

Now the necessity of defining clearly several concepts such as objectively right, subjectively right, and so on, arises from the fact that common-sense, in deciding whether an action is right or wrong, does not take into account *only* the motive from which it was done, or *only* its actual consequences, or *only* what the agent thought would be its consequences; it usually takes all three into consideration. But being common-sense and not philosophical theory, it is a little vague about the relative weight to be given to each of these factors, and it is not possessed of a clearly defined terminology. The whole purpose of the discussion which we are considering is to define clearly a number of concepts which shall correspond as closely as possible to the more or less vague notions which common-sense seems to employ. Those concepts as defined by Mr. Russell are as follows:

(1) A *most fortunate* act. This is an act which has as good consequences as any that is open to the agent.

(2) An *objectively right* act. This is an act which, when account is taken of all available data, will probably be most fortunate.

(3) A *subjectively right* act, or moral act. This is an act which the agent would judge to be right after an appropriate amount of candid thought.

These distinctions are adopted by Mr. Russell as corresponding more or less closely to various distinctions recognised by common-sense. There is a sense in which a right act is one which will have as good consequences as any that is open to the agent; but if we simply define a

right act in this way, we are led to the paradox that often a right act cannot be an act that we ought to do. For it is impossible to foresee all the consequences of an act; and, as Mr. Russell puts it, "it may happen that the act which will in fact prove the most fortunate is likely according to all the evidence at our disposal, to be less fortunate than some other. In such a case, it will be, at least in one sense, objectively wrong to go against the evidence, in spite of the actual good result of our doing so. There have certainly been some men who have done so much harm that it would have been fortunate for the world if their nurses had killed them in infancy. But if their nurses had done so their action would not have been objectively right, because the probability was that it would not have the best effects." Mr. Russell therefore introduces the concept of an objectively right action, defined as above, as corresponding to one important sense in which we commonly talk of a right action.

Mr. Broad's criticism is directed to showing that this notion is not sufficiently defined by Mr. Russell, and that if we do proceed to try to make it unambiguous by expanding it, our attempts still leave us in the end with an ambiguous notion. He begins by pointing out that we cannot talk of the probability of a proposition, but only of its probability in relation to certain data; and that we must also distinguish factual data from ethical premises and principles of inference. A "probably most fortunate act" for any agent is, therefore, a more complicated conception than would at first appear. Further, the question of probability enters twice; we have to take account not only of the probability of certain consequences happening, but of the probability of their value being so and so. This being so, we have to state clearly (which Mr. Russell has not done) whether the objective rightness of an act depends on the actual value of its probable consequences, or on the probable value of its actual consequences, or on the probable value of its probable consequences. Even if we get rid of this ambiguity by accepting definitely the last

interpretation, we find that even within this an ambiguity remains. For (to quote Mr. Broad) "suppose that an agent has two actions,  $X$  and  $Y$ , open to him. Suppose, further, that relative to the propositions that the agent believes and disbelieves, the most probable consequences of  $X$  are  $A$ , and that their probability is  $p$ . Let the most probable consequences of  $Y$  be  $B$ , and let their probability be  $q$ . Further, let the most probable measure of the goodness of  $A$  be  $x$ , and the most probable measure of the goodness of  $B$  be  $y$ . Now suppose that  $p < q$  and  $x > y$ . What then is objectively right? Ought the man to choose the act whose most probable consequences are less probable, but most probably more good, or the one whose most probable consequence is more probable, but most probably less good?"

This certainly sounds very complicated, and we might be tempted to say impatiently that the distinction is only a piece of hair-splitting and utterly remote from any real problem of ethics. But, as a matter of fact, problems of this nature do actually occur, and it may be worth while to give an example, since Mr. Broad has not done so.

Suppose I am standing on the sea-shore or on a river-bank, and see that three children have fallen into the water. Summing up the situation rapidly, I realise that if I swim to the spot I can probably rescue one of the children, but that before I could bring it to the shore and return, the other two will almost certainly be drowned. I also know that there is a boat near at hand, and that if I run immediately and row out I have a fair chance of saving all three children; but that I am not so certain of being able in this way to save *any* of them as I am of being able to save one if I swim instead of going for the boat. Which course of action ought I to choose—that which will probably save one child but not the others, or that which may save all three but where the risk of failing completely is greater? It is clear, of course, that either of these alternatives is better than to stand pondering on the question until it is too late to do anything.

The notion, then, of an "objectively right action" which seemed at first so simple, turns out in the end to be exceedingly complicated and none the less infected with ambiguity; and while in its simple form it seemed a reasonable interpretation of one of the notions of common-sense, its developed form seems so remote from anything intended by common-sense that it becomes very doubtful whether it is a useful notion at all. Mr. Broad, therefore, turns to Mr. Moore's theory in search of a possible alternative. In this search it is not necessary, for our present purposes, to follow him; for, as we shall see later, the problems which have confronted us in seeking to define the notion of "a probably most fortunate action" arise again in another form, even if we try to dispense with this notion in passing judgment on the actions of others.

I pass on to another point made by Mr. Broad. He objects to the narrow sense in which Mr. Russell takes "consequences" when judging of the rightness of an action. Mr. Russell seems to consider as relevant only those "consequences" which follow an action in time and which are directly due to it. But, Mr. Broad argues, we need a wider conception than this; we need the conception of the total state of the universe, past, present, and future, as modified by the action in question. The reason why this wider conception is necessary lies in the Principle of Organic Unities. That principle asserts that the value of a whole is not necessarily equal to the sum of the values of its component parts, taken in isolation; it may even happen that the value of a whole is increased by the addition of a factor which taken by itself is evil; for example, pain is admitted by nearly everyone to be an evil, yet many people hold that the infliction of pain as a punishment for wickedness gives us in some way a better state of things than if wickedness were allowed to go unpunished. It follows, therefore, Mr. Broad argues, that an action whose direct consequences are good may yet make the total state of the universe less good than if it had not been done; for the addition to a whole of a factor in itself good may

make that whole worse. Now it would be paradoxical to say that an action which makes the total state of the universe less good is a right action; therefore it is more reasonable to define a right action (or most fortunate action) as one that makes the total value of the universe as great as possible, than to define it as one that has as good direct consequences as possible.

So far I have summarised Mr. Broad's position; possibly at too great length for those who have his article before them, and too briefly for those who have not.

As I said at the beginning of this paper, his arguments if accepted lead us to an almost complete scepticism; and I have now to show why this is the case. The sceptical conclusions do not appear in the article because there Mr. Broad is concerned simply to discover certain clearly-defined notions corresponding more or less closely to the notions used by common-sense in judging of the rightness or wrongness of actions. So when a notion such as that of "probably most fortunate action" turns out to be unprofitable, he simply rejects it and seeks for some other. And he is able ultimately, in choosing his list of ethical concepts, to avoid those which imply complicated calculations of probability; objective rightness is defined without any reference to probability, and subjective rightness is not considered as being a very important conception.

Now all this can only be done when one remains at the point of view of the spectator, which is the point of view from which Mr. Broad considers the question in his article. The moment the question becomes a practical one, the moment any individual has to ask himself, "What ought *I* to do in these present circumstances?" at that moment all these difficulties about probability come back.

For consider the case of such an individual who desires to act rightly. Mr. Broad would reply to his enquiry, "The right action, the action you ought to perform, is such an action as will make the total value of the universe at least as great as any other action open to you." Now no doubt there is a sense of "right" in which this is the correct

answer; but be that as it may, such an answer helps the enquirer hardly at all. For, not being omniscient, he does not know with certainty what action will produce this result; the conception of right which can alone be useful to him is that of objective rightness in the sense which Mr. Broad has shown to be so complicated. The answer to his question is, "You ought to perform an action which will probably, on your information, make the total value of the universe at least as great as any other action open to you." But as we have seen, this answer is ambiguous; for the question of probability enters twice: first, there is the probable result of the action and then there is the probable value of that result. The first difficulty arising from this—the doubt as to whether "actual value of probable consequences," or "probable value of actual consequences," or "probable value of probable consequences," is to be our criterion, is not I think a very serious one. Since we are now considering the matter from the point of view of the agent, who can only take probability as his guide, it seems clear that the last of these interpretations is the one which must be adopted here. And this question will be further cleared up in what I have to say later on the conception of "probable value."

The other difficulty, however, still remains: Ought the agent to choose that action the most probable result of which is less probable but most probably more good, or that action whose most probable result is more probable but most probably less good?

But even without this latter difficulty the position seems hopeless enough. For there must always be two calculations involved: First the calculation as to the probable consequences of an action, and then the calculation as to the probable effect on the total value of the universe of these consequences if they do happen. Now the first of these, taken simply by itself, presents considerable difficulties. Problems of mathematical probability, where the factors are simple and clearly defined, admit of exact numerical solutions; but when it is a question of ordinary



events of all kinds, and when we are not able arbitrarily to limit the material, exact numerical solutions cannot be given. In such cases the probability remains a vaguer magnitude; the most we can ever say is that one thing is considerably more probable than another, never that it is exactly so many times more probable. And in some cases, it is difficult to establish any relation at all between two different probabilities—between the probability, for instance, that it will rain to-morrow, and the probability that apples will be sold at threepence a pound next October. And when we remember that it is necessary to take into consideration *all* the probable consequences of an action, throughout the whole of future time, it becomes clear enough that this problem, by itself, presents great difficulties. And when on the top of all this, we have to go on and consider the effect on the total value of the universe of each possible result, remembering that a state of things which seems good when considered by itself may, when added to the universe as existing before the action was done, actually make the total state of the universe less good—when we have to do this, there is really only one conclusion that we can reach, and that is that it is as good as impossible ever to know which actions we ought to perform. The position forced on us is far beyond anything that common-sense would admit as to the difficulty of deciding in certain cases; it is not a question of certain cases only, or of mere difficulty. If Mr. Broad's theories are true, then it is not merely *often difficult*, it is *always impossible*, to know what it is right to do.

Such then is the conclusion to which, in the long run, Mr. Broad's arguments lead us. Ethics remains as a branch of pure theory; it can continue to define various concepts, to lay down certain general principles. But we shall never be able to apply those concepts or those principles in practical matters. In other words, the confession will have to be made that no guidance on questions of conduct can be looked for from reason.

Now since most people could not get on without some

rules by which to regulate their conduct (the solution of not worrying about right or wrong, but simply satisfying one's personal desires, would probably in the end fail to satisfy), the acceptance of this conclusion, were there any probability of its being generally accepted, would in all probability lead many to look to some authority which claimed that it could tell them what to do—very possibly to the Roman Catholic Church. When we remember the confident trust in reason with which the philosophy of Mr. Moore and Mr. Russell started out, we should I think be a little surprised if this were found to be its outcome.

It seems worth while then, before accepting such a desperate remedy, to scrutinise Mr. Broad's position very closely and see whether we are really shut up to those conclusions. To escape them, we must find reason for rejecting (or rather, show that there is no reason to accept) either the principles from which he starts, or some among the links of his argument.

It is natural, first, to direct our attention to the main principle on which everything else rests, viz., the doctrine of consequences.

Stating this doctrine from the point of view of the agent, we may define it as the doctrine that, in considering how he should act, a man must be guided solely by the probable consequences of his action. Now it is clear that in order to escape from our difficulties, it is not enough merely to deny this doctrine, *i.e.*, to assert that consequences are not the only question to be considered. It would be necessary to go further than this, and to assert that consequences need not be considered at all. For so long as consequences remain one important factor, even though not the only one, we cannot escape from the necessity of calculating probable consequences, and thus all our difficulties remain.

Now while many people might be ready to assert that consequences are not the only thing to be considered, there are very few, I think, who would hold that they need not be considered at all. It is true that something like this latter view has been held by certain philosophers,

whose view was that in acting all we need to do is to conform to certain rules or formal laws, regardless of consequences. But scarcely anyone among present-day writers on ethics holds such a view. Therefore it will be better, before resorting to this solution of our difficulties, to see whether there is no other part of Mr. Broad's argument which it is easier to attack.

Now the *impasse* in which our hypothetical individual found himself, when he attempted to decide, in certain circumstances, on a right course of action, consisted in two main difficulties: (1) The difficulty of calculating the probable total results of any action, and (2) the difficulty of calculating the probable effect, on the total value of the universe, of those results if they actually took place. Let us first consider the second of these difficulties.

It is to be noted that Mr. Broad has not explained the meaning of the conception which he introduces, of the *probable* goodness of a certain state of affairs. He appears to suggest that, just as any proposition about matters of fact has a certain probability relative to certain other propositions about matters of fact, so a proposition about the value of anything has a certain probability relative to certain other propositions about values. But the two things are not quite on a level. In the first case, the data with reference to which the probability of a proposition is determined are capable of almost infinite variety; they may be almost any propositions about individual matters of fact. Different persons calculating the probability of a certain event occurring will often each be in possession of different groups of data. But in the second case, that of the probable value of a given state of things, it seems at first sight as if the data were much more limited in character, and could only be propositions stating ethical principles. Now it is not clear that there is any such concept as the probable value of a given state of things relative to ethical principles as data. It seems rather to be simply a case of applying principles to a particular case. Thus if we hold the hedonist view, and if we know the exact

amount of pleasure and of pain in a given state of things, it would appear that we can judge immediately as to the value of that state of things, and that probability does not come in at all.

We can, however, give a sense to the notion of probable value if we accept a further principle, the Principle of Organic Unities, and accept it in a certain form; and it seems likely that Mr. Broad intends to refer to that principle when he speaks of probable value. If we accept this principle in Mr. Broad's form, then we may know the exact value of a certain state of things considered in isolation, but we may not be sure of the difference made to the total value of the universe by the addition of this extra piece. For it may be that the whole universe is an organic unity, and that its total value is quite different from the sum of the value of its parts, taken in isolation. Even, then, if we are in possession of the whole body of true ethical principles, we shall not be able to decide on the difference made to the total value of the universe by the addition of some given thing or things, unless we also know all about the condition of the universe before this addition. Now as no one knows all this, no one will be able to pronounce with certainty on the difference made to the value of the universe by the addition of some given thing or things; but it is possible that we may be able to say that, relative to what we do know about the universe, the addition of some thing or things will *probably* increase its value. We can thus give a meaning to probable value; the probability will be relative not merely to ethical principles but to propositions about the condition of the universe.

Now the introduction, into the definition of right action, of this conception of the total value of the universe was precisely one of the things which made our calculation as to the probable consequences of an action so complicated. If this conception could be rejected, and the rightness of an action made to depend simply on its probable direct consequences, a large part of our difficulties would disappear. For, as we have seen, the difficulties about probable

value do not arise until we bring in the doctrine of organic unities, and have to extend our view over the whole universe. If then we can show that this doctrine has been pressed too far, we shall be able not only to contract our view within reasonable limits, but further to simplify matters by getting rid of probable value.

Let us consider for a moment the Principle of Organic Unities. Mr. Moore, who was the first to state this principle and to claim for it great importance, formulates it as follows: *The amount by which the value of a whole exceeds that of one of its factors is not necessarily equal to that of the remaining factors.*<sup>1</sup> We can state this in another form by saying that if an addition is made to a whole of a certain value, the increase in the value of the whole is not necessarily equal to the value of the addition taken in isolation. It is important to notice just how much these statements assert. They are not assertions of a positive general principle, but rather denials. That is to say, it is not asserted that the amount by which the value of a whole exceeds that of one of its factors is *never* equal to that of the remaining factors; all that is asserted is that the opposite principle is not necessarily true. Even, then, if we grant the truth of Mr. Moore's principle, it may still be true that in the case of the great majority of wholes in the universe, the amount by which a whole exceeds that of one of its factors is exactly equal to that of its remaining factors; or in other words, that the value of most wholes is the sum of the values of their factors.

It is natural to ask at this point what reason we have for accepting Mr. Moore's principle. Mr. Moore himself does not actually assert it, but brings it forward as probably true. And he is led to this position simply by considering certain wholes, and finding that their value does not seem

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<sup>1</sup> *G. E. Moore's Ethics* (Home University Library), ch. vii. This is Mr. Moore's latest formulation of the principle. He does not here give it the name of Principle of Organic Unities; but it (or a similar principle) is so named in the earlier *Principia Ethica*, and I have, following Mr. Broad, retained this name as convenient.

to be simply the sum of the values of their factors. His chief instance is that of a state of mind containing some pleasure along with other factors, such as knowledge or admiration of beauty. He considers it very probable that no state of mind has any intrinsic value unless it contains some pleasure, and, therefore, if the pleasure were deducted from the state of mind in question, leaving only the other factors, what remained would have no value by itself. Now if the principle of organic unities were not true, it would follow that this remainder had no value even within the whole and, therefore, could not contribute anything to the value of the whole, and that all the value the whole originally contained was due simply to the pleasure in it, the other factors being quite indifferent. Mr. Moore thinks that this conclusion cannot be true; knowledge, admiration of beauty, etc., even though having no value apart from pleasure, do seem to increase the value of some wholes to which they are added; and therefore the principle of organic unities must be true.

The principle, then, is founded simply upon the examination of a number of cases. No more is asserted in fact than that some organic unities do exist; it is not asserted that all wholes having ethical value must be organic unities.

Let us now return to Mr. Broad's arguments for his view that, in deciding on the rightness or wrongness of an action, we must take into consideration its effect on the total value of the universe. He argues that it is not enough to take into consideration merely direct consequences, for although these may be good their result on the total value of the universe may be to make it less good; and this is so because the whole universe may be an organic unity of the kind we have been describing.

Now it is impossible to prove that the universe is not such a unity. It may be that the effect of all the good things in it is only to make it worse than it could have been without their existence, or again that the effect of all the evil things in it is to make it better than it could have been were there no evil; and this latter view has, indeed, been

held by some philosophers and theologians. But so far as I can see, no conclusive arguments for such a view have ever been put forward, and there seems no reason why we should accept it. The only safe method of procedure seems to be to consider carefully what classes of things do really appear to be organic unities, starting from those cases on which the principle has been founded. To do this completely, it would be necessary to consider every kind of whole which could lay claim to any value—and that would be in effect to construct a large part of a system of ethics. All that can be attempted here is to survey the ground very roughly.

First, we may attempt to fix a lower limit for organic unities; that is, to decide what are the simplest kinds of wholes which can be organic unities. On this point there is substantial agreement; nothing but states of consciousness can be intrinsically good or evil. Most people would say further that the state of consciousness (or mental state, as we may call it for the sake of brevity) must be of a certain complexity, or that the conscious being whose state it is must have reached a certain degree of development, if it is to have value. It may be doubted whether the mental state of a protozoon (if protozoa have mental states) can have any value.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Moore's view is that nothing can be an intrinsic good unless it contains both some feeling and also some other form of consciousness.

So much then for our lower limit. Passing on, it is clear that any wholes which have value must, if they are not mental states, contain mental states as parts. Of such wholes there appear to be three classes:

(1) A number of mental states of the same individual following each other in time and constituting as it were his mental life-history. It seems probable that a whole of this kind can have a much higher value than a mere collection of mental states (if such a thing be possible) could

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<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, I think we must admit that the mental states of some comparatively low kind of living beings can be good or evil. This is certainly admitted by anyone who holds that it is wrong to boil crabs alive.

have. Most systems of ethics which are not hedonistic appear to hold that the supreme good is such a whole, or a combination of such wholes. Whether we consider the system of Aristotle, or the Stoic view that virtue is the sole good, or the doctrine of modern idealism which places the good in self-realisation, it is clear that in all these cases a conscious existence extending over a considerable period of time and forming a developed individuality is essential. Now in the case of a whole of this kind there seems some ground for holding that its value partly consists in the balance or just mutual proportion of various qualities which are themselves valuable; and if this is so, the value of the whole will be greater than the sum of the values of its parts.

(2) The combination of a mental state with some external object. It is unnecessary here to raise the question whether every mental state must have an object; for it seems clear that all mental states which have any value do have an object. It may, therefore, be agreed that we were wrong in taking a mere mental state as our lower limit; for the real unit is the mental state along with its object. To this it may be replied that while the mental state cannot exist apart from some object, it is, nevertheless, distinct from its objects, and that the value of the whole may reside entirely in the mental part of the whole. If this were so, the whole would not be an organic unity; but on the other hand, it is possible that organic unities of this kind do exist. Consider, for example, the mental state of a man who was admiring some beautiful object which did not as a matter of fact exist but was only an illusion; it is a plausible view that such a state of things would not be so good as one where the man's state of mind was exactly the same, but the object of his admiration was real. If now we grant that a beautiful object by itself, apart from any mind being conscious of it, has no value, it follows that the state of things in the second case forms an organic unity. There is, however, a possible objection to this view. It may be said that the state of mind of the man in the first case included a wrong judgment about the



existence of the admired object, and that it was the existence of this error which decreased the value of his mental state.

I conclude then that it is doubtful whether there exist organic unities of this second type.

(3) Wholes consisting of a group of minds in certain relations. The simplest instance of a whole of this kind is a friendship. Such a state of things is commonly admitted to be good; and by its very definition it is a whole which must contain at least two minds. Is this whole an organic unity? The answer seems doubtful, for the same kind of reason as applies in the case of a whole formed by a mental state and its object. The two elements of the whole—the mental state of the two friends—cannot exist apart. And although they are distinct from each other, and each has its own value (the value of one may clearly be greater than that of the other), I see no reason for supposing that the value of the whole is not equal to the sum of the values of its parts.

More complicated groups consist of a number of individuals forming a society, such as a state. It is sometimes held that a state has a value greater than the value of the individuals composing it; but exactly the same remarks apply as in the case of a friendship. No doubt the individuals forming a state may have a higher value than they could have in isolation, but in the latter case they would not be exactly the same individuals, for a great part of their personality consists in their social relationships. No arguments of this kind, therefore, can show that a society is an organic unity in one sense of the phrase.

I conclude then that there is no good reason for supposing that there exists any organic unity more complicated than the whole composed of the total mental states of one individual.

The bearing of this conclusion on our main problem, to which it is now time to return, is obvious. So long as it seemed a probable view that the universe might be an organic unity, it was always possible that consequences which were, when considered by themselves, clearly good, might yet in combination with other elements of the

universe which were outside the range of our vision, produce a universe less good than if those consequences had not existed. But if there is no reason to suppose that very complicated organic unities exist, if we can as it were safely break up the universe into pieces of a manageable size without thereby falsifying our judgments of value, then it becomes possible rightly to evaluate any given group of consequences and hence to decide whether an action issuing in such consequences is right or wrong. It remains of course *possible* that the whole universe forms an organic unity, and it is permissible to speculate as to this possibility and its results on the practicability of right conduct, just as it is permissible to speculate as to what song the Sirens sang. But we should scarcely permit of any speculation of the latter kind being used as the foundation of a history of primitive music; and we are equally within our rights in refusing to consider a speculation of the former kind when our problem is one of practical ethics.

So far then we have got rid of the necessity of bringing the whole universe into every judgment of right and wrong, and we get rid at the same time, as has been shown above, of the conception of probable value. The whole problem is, therefore, much simplified.

There remains, however, the difficulty which I have exemplified in the case of the drowning children. For in that case, the value of the consequences was taken as ascertained; it was not the question of probable value which caused the difficulty. We are, therefore, no nearer a solution of this problem; nor have I any solution to offer, though it is possible that the notion of "expectation of goodness" may not be so unprofitable as Mr. Broad seems to think. But although the definition of "a probably most fortunate act" remains imperfect until this point is cleared up, the difficulty is not so serious from the practical point of view, which is the one we are interested in at present. This is so simply because cases of this kind are rare; in far the greater part of the decisions we have to make, it is not this particular difficulty which causes the

trouble. And when such cases do occur, there is this to be remembered: That although it is difficult to decide which of two courses of action is right, we at least know that one of them is right; all other courses of action except these two (for usually it is not a question of a choice between *two* only) are, *ex hypothesi*, less good than either of the two.

There remains, further, the first group of difficulties, those which consisted, not in uncertainty as to the final value of a given set of consequences, but in the uncertainty as to what the consequences of any action will be. On this point I have few remarks to make. The difficulty is a real one, and is recognised to be so by common-sense; but it was only when combined with the other difficulty which we have been discussing that it seemed so insuperable. The decision as to the probable consequences of an action is difficult enough; but the problem is somewhat simplified when it is remembered that only the consequences which *are* probable need be considered. Any action, of course, is bound to have remote consequences which cannot be foreseen; but just in so far as it is impossible to foresee them, they cease to be important from the point of view of probability. Where almost anything may happen, the probability of any one thing happening must be small; the remote consequences, therefore, can be ignored in comparison with the direct consequences which have a much higher degree of probability. If, therefore, any practical conclusion follows from a consideration of this difficulty, it is that we ought to take short views. The probable immediate consequences of an action must weigh more with us than those which are only probable consequences of probable consequences. And this will supply an argument in favour of the maxim condemned by Mr. Broad in his first paragraph, that "you must never do evil that good may come." For the evil in such a case is an immediate consequence and, therefore, highly probable; the good is only a further consequence hoped for, and, therefore, less probable than the evil.

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